



Sen. J oyce Mulliken's

UPDATE FROM OLYMPIA

3/14/03

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Committee Assignments
Land Use & Planning (Chair)
Highways & Transportation
Higher Education

Senate Bills to Watch

SB 5775 – Establishes a new tax on RVs. *(This bill passed the Senate Parks, Fish & Wildlife Committee but died in Senate Ways & Means. There is a possibility this tax will be revived in the budget down the road. Sen. Mulliken is opposed to this tax and will fight against it.)*

SB 5108 – Removing statutory authority for access to private property. *(This bill passed the Land Use & Planning Committee and the Ways & Means Committee. It is now in the Rules Committee awaiting further action.)*

SB 5409 – Providing for direct petition annexation. *(Passed the Senate and is now in the House Local Government Committee.)*

SB 5295 – Places a \$15 fee on studded snow tires. *(Passed the Senate Transportation Committee and is now in the Senate Rules Committee. Sen. Mulliken is against this fee and will vote against it if it comes up for a vote.)*

Dear Friends,

We have endured a flurry of action this past week as Senate bills that made it through the committee process now get dealt with by the entire Senate. It has been a long and productive week.

Yesterday, the Senate passed legislation granting school districts and public universities the option to create charter schools in Washington state.

Senate Bill 5012 passed the Senate 26-23. It authorizes 70 charter schools over the next six years, but only five new schools in each of the first two years. Districts that sponsor charter schools would be eligible for federal money for charter startups as part of President Bush's No Child Left Behind education policy.

This bill is not a mandatory directive at all. It simply makes charter schools possible. It is local decision-making at its best. It gives parents, teachers and school boards the choice.

I am also very excited about another piece of legislation that passed the Senate this week – **Senate Bill 5521**. This bill allows insurance carriers to tailor their plans to the needs of individual small businesses in Washington state.

As many of you know, mandated benefits have driven health insurance costs for businesses through the roof. In 1963, there was one mandated benefit required of insurance sold in Washington. By 2002, there were more than 45. While large businesses may be able to absorb some of these costs, small businesses cannot. Often, a small business ends up canceling their employees' health plans simply because they can't afford the skyrocketing prices.

Senate Bill 5521 allows insurance companies to offer different health care packages based on customer needs, not state mandates. Under this bill, coverage would still include such basic services as optometrists, registered and advanced nurse practitioners, chemical dependency treatment, and mammograms. Employers would be able to purchase coverage for additional services if they so desired.

Both employees and employers benefit from this legislation. This is a huge cost for small businesses and it's about time there was some measure of relief.

As always, please contact my office with your questions or concerns. It is always a pleasure to hear from you.

Sincerely,

Sen. Joyce Mulliken, 13th Legislative District